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Countering Trafficking in Moldova

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COUNTERING TRAFFICKING IN MOLDOVA

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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors
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Summary

Over half a million of Moldovans reside outside the country, working in jobs that earn them a meagre pay and very little protection. These migrants produce c. one third of the GNP of the Republic of Moldova. The main insight of this report is that understanding the mechanisms of trafficking in human beings requires looking at the phenomenon as a part of the labour markets of migrants; majority of migrants from poor countries work in conditions far worse than is the norm in destination countries, and trafficking is merely an extreme example of the much more widespread trend of exploitation of labour migrants. The vast majority of people, globally, who are trafficked are migrant workers, and those seeking jobs abroad are the vast majority also in Moldova. It is therefore obvious, that trafficking exists in many sectors, although the large majority of the resources directed to counter-trafficking targets trafficking for exploitation in the sex industry.

International organisations still bear a considerable part of the responsibility of counter-trafficking work in Moldova. In

addition to traditional victims' assistance, the organizations also carry out prevention campaigns and preventive assistance, as well as collect and analyse information. The Government of Moldova has slowly but steadily increased its participation in the counter-trafficking efforts, and has simultaneously updated the related legislation. Despite the considerable efforts Moldova remains, in light of the small population, one of the biggest countries of origin for human trafficking. The challenges of combating trafficking in Moldova are largely the same as elsewhere: obtaining timely information, battling stigmatisation of victims, difficulty of addressing trafficking separately from other exploitation in labour markets, heavy concentration on trafficking for sexual exploitation, as well as the individual nature of assistance vs. structural causes of trafficking. On the other hand, the assistance efforts in Moldova are exceptionally efficient in taking into consideration the individual needs and circumstances of each victims. Identification and prevention measures are also highly developed.

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Foreword

The purpose of this report is to describe the counter-trafficking work carried out in the Republic of Moldova. The premise is that due to the extent of the phenomenon in the country, Moldova has been forced to take trafficking seriously, and that learning from the insights and approaches developed there might help in developing counter-trafficking field in other countries. This report aims to provide an overall description of the counter-trafficking field in Moldova, and to provide the reader with basic understanding of the cooperation at the centre of the efforts. In addition to multidisciplinary approach, being flexible in providing assistance and protection seems to be a key ingredient of the Moldovan model and indeed, flexibility is a prerequisite for needs-based trafficking work and one of the strengths of the Moldovan response – unfortunately respecting it's centrality is also a challenge for an overall description such as this report. Similarly a challenge is that the knowledge about trafficking is based on the cases that have been brought to the attention of authorities or organisations and is therefore both selective and historical; most likely only a fraction of actual cases are known, and by the time the information of these cases has been analysed trafficking trends have probably already changed.

This report is based on interviews with staff of different organisations, carried out in Moldova in April 2009, as well as on literature which touches upon trafficking in Moldova. The report has two parts; the first

chapters describe Moldova and counter-trafficking efforts in the country, while the latter chapters consider the challenges for the work. Concrete examples are given in the text; some are isolated incidents and observations, of the prevalence of which there is no certainty, and others describe specific projects or practises. These examples allow having a feel for the environment in which the Moldovan actors operate and align their policies.

It is good to bear in mind that while the report concentrates on actual counter-trafficking efforts, trafficking is a structural problem. Almost all the interviewed experts underlined that the fall in numbers of the most violent cases is linked to the overall increase in living standards in Moldova in the recent years, largely as a result of money sent home by migrants. However, it is also evident that the evolvement of counter-trafficking efforts has had an effect on the way the traffickers conduct their business: it is safer for them, instead of the use of obvious force and violence, to allow the victims some freedom and some money, so that trafficking becomes harder to identify. For example Turkey has recently deported numerous persons, considered to be victims of trafficking by IOM, as prostitutes or illegal aliens. Nevertheless, eradicating poverty, reducing pay gaps, increasing employment opportunities and increasing equality (including measures to combat violence against women) are a crucial part of the fight against trafficking.

I Trafficking in Moldova

I.1 Moldova

Moldova declared independence in August 1991. The official language is Moldovan, which linguists consider as a dialect or Romanian. Russian is also spoken widely. Moldova is largely an agricultural country, and one of the poorest in Europe. Until the disputed elections in April 2009 Moldova was ruled by a market-orientated communist party.

The early 1990s, the period following the fall of the Soviet Union, had a significant impact for the living standards of Moldovans; unemployment became strife and social security was diminished. The consequence was that 60 % of the population had to survive with an income below the absolute poverty line. Especially the difficult the situation became for families, pensioners and people in the rural areas. Despite equal levels of education, nearly 70 % of the unemployed were women. Now the situation has become more stable, and poverty has decreased. Nevertheless, the average monthly salary, c. 175 euro, is the lowest in Europe. As the average salary suggests, declared jobs do not allow most Moldovans to earn a living and people look for alternative sources of revenue; complementary and undeclared jobs, as well as subsistence farming have an effect on the welfare of families. Remittances also constitute a major source of revenue for Moldovans.

The trafficking situation in Moldova is further complicated by the existence of

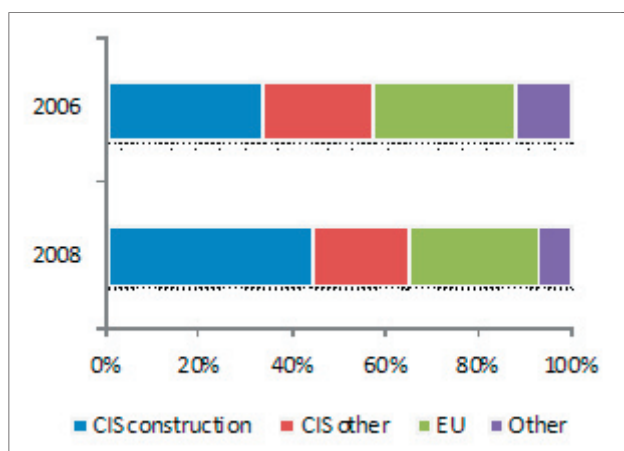


the break-away region of Transnistria. The area east of the river Nistru, bordering Ukraine, has not been controlled by central Moldovan authorities since the region declared unilaterally its independence in 1990. While the region is *de jure* part of Moldova, *de facto* Transnistria remains under the administration of the authorities in Tiraspol, the “capital” of Transnistria. The area has its own infrastructure, including government, parliament, military, police etc, and is Russian-speaking. It is a widely held

belief that the area is a major route for the smuggling of people – even if there seems to be little evidence that the smuggling of arms and drugs is as widespread as previously thought.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that considering different estimates it is likely that altogether, out of a population of approximately 4 million, up to 600 000 Moldovans reside outside the country under different status. Regional implications of migration can be even greater than this number suggests, as there are villages where nearly all adults of working age have migrated. The largest individual group is men leaving Moldova to work in the construction sector in other CIS countries¹. The majority of migrants to the EU25 region, Turkey and Romania, on the other hand, are women. However, the situation is fluid and likely to change due to the current economic crisis, which has affected employment opportunities in construction more quickly than in other sectors.

Graph 1: Main destination countries for migrants, CIS construction sector specified



Source: Luecke, Matthias & Mahmoud, Toman Omar & Steinmayr, Andreas (2008) *Labor Migration and Remittances, Moldova 2008: Is the Boom Over?* IOM/ILO Seminar - Chisinau - December 18

Remittances account for roughly one third of the Moldovan GNP (1.65 billion USD in 2008). In addition to the remittances sent through formal channels, there is the money sent through informal channels – typically bus-drivers or fellow migrants going home – which are estimated to have accounted for another 400 million USD the same year. Majority of this money is spent on daily consumption and e.g. home renovations and according to IOM, in approximately 50% of all the remittance-receiving households, remittances fund more than half of current expenditures, and furthermore, a third of the population resides in households that receive remittances. Migrants also contribute to the communities they are from, by supporting for example the local church, educational institutions and infrastructure. As there is an evident reduction in the amount the migrants are able to send home due to the crisis, this is having a major impact on Moldovan households.

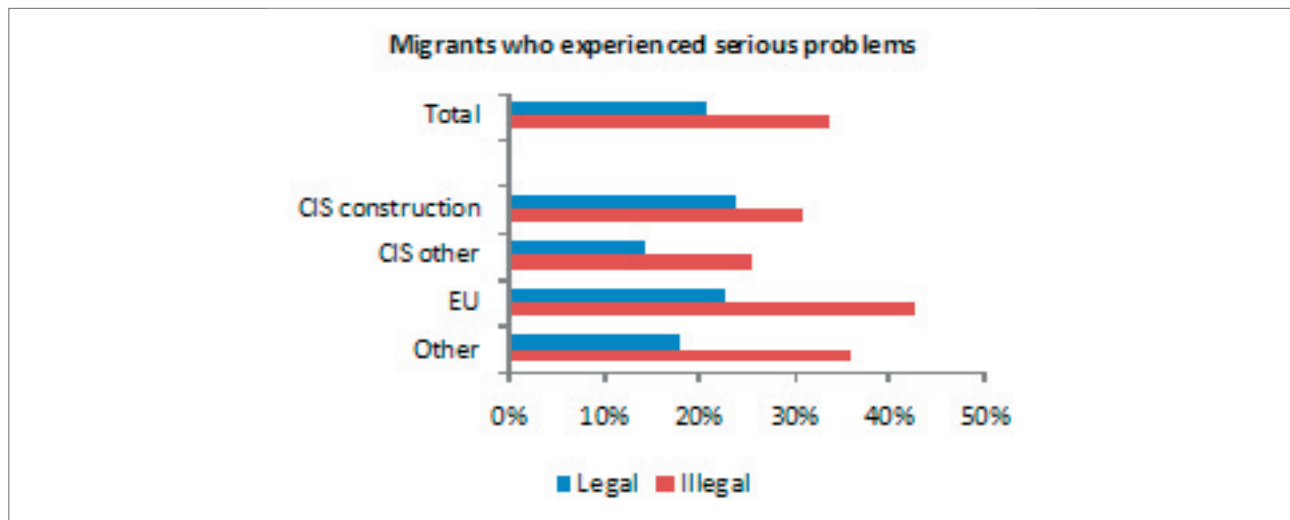
An estimated one third of Moldovan migrants have an irregular status in their countries of destination. Illegal residence status seems to have become more widespread among Moldovan migrants in CIS countries, while the situation has improved in EU and other host countries. The irregular status of migrants has a significant effect on their situation, by increasing risk of abuse, arbitrary treatment on behalf of local authorities and

¹ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization whose participating countries are former Soviet Republics: Armenia, Azerbaidžan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (Ukraine and Georgia are included in these statistics although they ceased to belong to CIS at the end of 2008).

sub-standard working conditions. Keeping in touch with families in country of origin or

travelling to meet them is also more difficult for migrants with an irregular status.

Graph 2: Effect of irregular status on experience of serious problems



Source: Luecke, Matthias & Mahmoud, Toman Omar & Steinmayr, Andreas (2008) *Labor Migration and Remittances, Moldova 2008: Is the Boom Over?* IOM/ILO Seminar - Chisinau - December 18

I.2 Trafficking

Trafficking is the exploitation of another person or their work through deception, coercion, often in surroundings unfamiliar to the person exploited. Trafficking is often transnational, and linked to international crime, but it can also be internal. Traffickers rely on a wide variety of methods, often taking advantage of people in a vulnerable position, such as irregular migrants. Because a large number of Moldovans either migrate illegally or reside in their countries of destination illegally, they often depend on criminal networks to organise their travels and employment.

From the trafficking perspective Moldova is especially interesting due to the fact that despite higher numbers of victims from other countries, considering the small population of the country Moldova has undoubtedly

one of the largest volumes of trafficking per capita in the world. The full scale, or numbers of trafficking cases, remains, however, unknown as many victims go unidentified in the destination countries and in Moldova. Identification is a challenge due to changes in trends in trafficking, fear of stigmatization, low level of self identification, limited knowledge of human rights and trafficking issues, as well as the inability or unwillingness of some victims to report their trafficking experiences to the authorities. One indication of the extent of trafficking in Moldova is the total number of those assisted by IOM; between 2000 and 2008 there were 2,443 identified and assisted victims (see Graph 3 below). It is evident, that the effect on the society is considerable; the government is forced to take the issue seriously and many international

organisations operate in the country.

Most of the **identified victims** of trafficking are young women from rural areas; most have suffered of poverty and domestic violence prior to trafficking. Children or young adults who have been orphaned, or left behind by migrating parents, are especially vulnerable, as are the disabled. Trafficking happens in all major labour migration sectors, including domestic work, factory and agricultural work, as well as at the construction sector. It is important to note, however, that some victims are “would-be” labour migrants, i.e. people who never really enter the labour markets, but are exploited in private homes, e.g. in domestic servitude. Furthermore, while for all the ultimate aim is to earn a (better) living, some victims in Moldova have been lured into exploitation by for example false marriage proposals. There are, on the other hand, also cases where there has been no decision to migrate (traffickers targeting people on holiday/visiting family members, and outright abductions especially some years ago). The recent cases of IOM have a number of identified victims that were targeted by traffickers at a specific time and situation of extreme vulnerability (such as after losing a house in a fire, or after a parent or a child fell seriously ill).

In the case of women exploited for their labour in these sectors it is rather often the case that they are also exploited sexually. They might not be forced to work in the sex industry as such, but are nevertheless subjected to repeated sexual violence, sometimes to the financial profit of the traffickers, on top of the produce of their labour. While some

women do accept work in the sex industry (or as e.g. ‘dancers’, where the assumption of providing sexual services is implicit), and end up in a trafficking situation, majority of Moldovan women exploited sexually tell the assisting organizations that they did not accept work in the sex industry, but were deceived by offers of jobs as e.g. nannies, shop assistants, hotel workers and so forth. Most child victims are forced to beg (girls and boys under 12 years) or are forced to enter and exploited in the sex industry (teenaged girls). There are some cases of forced labour of children, as well as of illegal adoption. There has also been an increase in the number of men identified as having been trafficked for forced labour, particularly in the agricultural or construction sector. In addition disabled men, women and children are at risk of trafficking for forced begging.

Example: A man trafficked for begging was identified in Moscow. He had previously, due to alcohol abuse, had to have his legs amputated after passing out and spending the night outdoors. Later he fell into the hands of traffickers and was transported to Russia. The visible disability of being an invalid made him valuable for begging for the traffickers.

Differentiating between trafficking and labour code violations can be challenging. First of all, due to the shame attached to failure, stories of failed migrants do not spread nearly as much as success stories. Secondly, the conditions in the Moldovan labour market are often such that abuse is seen as normal up to a certain level – for example it is rather common that an employee is not paid. Victims do not therefore easily identify their situation as trafficking and it can be

assumed that especially the real numbers of men trafficked for labour exploitation are much higher than the identified and assisted numbers indicate. Especially in a country of deeply rooted, very traditional gender roles men are unlikely to see themselves as victims and to seek, or to accept, assistance.

Recruitment for trafficking happens mostly in the same way as for migration in general; through networks of friends and family. Sometimes the recruiters do not even realise that they are in fact part of a trafficking network. A significant role in the recruitment process is also played by thousands of employment and travel agencies, most of which do not have an official licence to practice their trade. In the majority of cases the victims leave Moldova after accepting an offer for employment, but as mentioned above, sometimes the recruitment can happen in the country of destination, e.g. during a tourist visit. There are also cases of victims having bought their freedom by recruiting others.

The situation in the break-away region of Transnistria is slightly different, due to the volatile situation in general and the exclusion of the region, leading to practical and

decision-making related challenges. As the central authorities have no means to operate in the region, international organisations implement their programmes through local NGOs. According to IOM statistics compared to its population a disproportionately high number of identified and assisted victims come from Transnistria. In addition there it is a widely shared view among the counter-trafficking community of Moldova that Transnistria is used to transport people also from elsewhere in Moldova.

Traffickers control their victims in the countries of destination usually through debt bondage, violence and threatening with violence (the person or their family) as well as through the lack of other possibilities. Travel costs are high, and usually the person is already in debt when reaching the country of destination. Furthermore, actual or assumed committed crimes keep the victims from contacting authorities; illegal entry, being involved in the sex industry or other illicit activity. Very often the victims have very little, if any, trust in the authorities, especially law enforcement, and there are cases when the police have returned the escaped victims back to the traffickers for a fee.

II Counter-trafficking efforts

The Moldovan state is poor and rather weak. The initiative in counter-trafficking work has therefore primarily come from international organisations, but from c. 2005-2006 there has been a marked shift in this; cooperation with the Government has increased and the state has increased its ownership of the efforts to tackle trafficking. The role of the international organisations remains, nevertheless, crucial, especially when it comes to financing the efforts. **OSCE Mission to Moldova** is largely responsible for coordination and exchange of information among actors, and the mission also has a person whose responsibility it is to monitor trafficking. **IOM Mission to Moldova** is also involved in coordination and support of the activities of different NGOs, in addition to running its own comprehensive programme. The IOM Prevention and Protection Program consists of proactive prevention and assistance and protection of victims on one hand, and capacity building and support to authorities as well as information gathering and analysing on the other. Prevention means informing of safe migration and raising awareness of the phenomenon, as well as direct assistance to at-risk cases, while assistance and protection includes repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration; from initial crisis services (the

only trafficking shelter in Moldova offers physical safety, psychological, medical, legal and social services and support) to long-term support (inclusion of family into the reintegration plan, education opportunities, employment support, case manager monitoring).

La Strada operates in nine, mostly East and Mid-European, countries. The organisation's activities expand three spheres: research and decision making, disseminating information on safe migration to potential migrants and support services to victims of trafficking. The La Strada International Centre for Women Rights Protection and Promotion was founded in Chisinau in 2001.

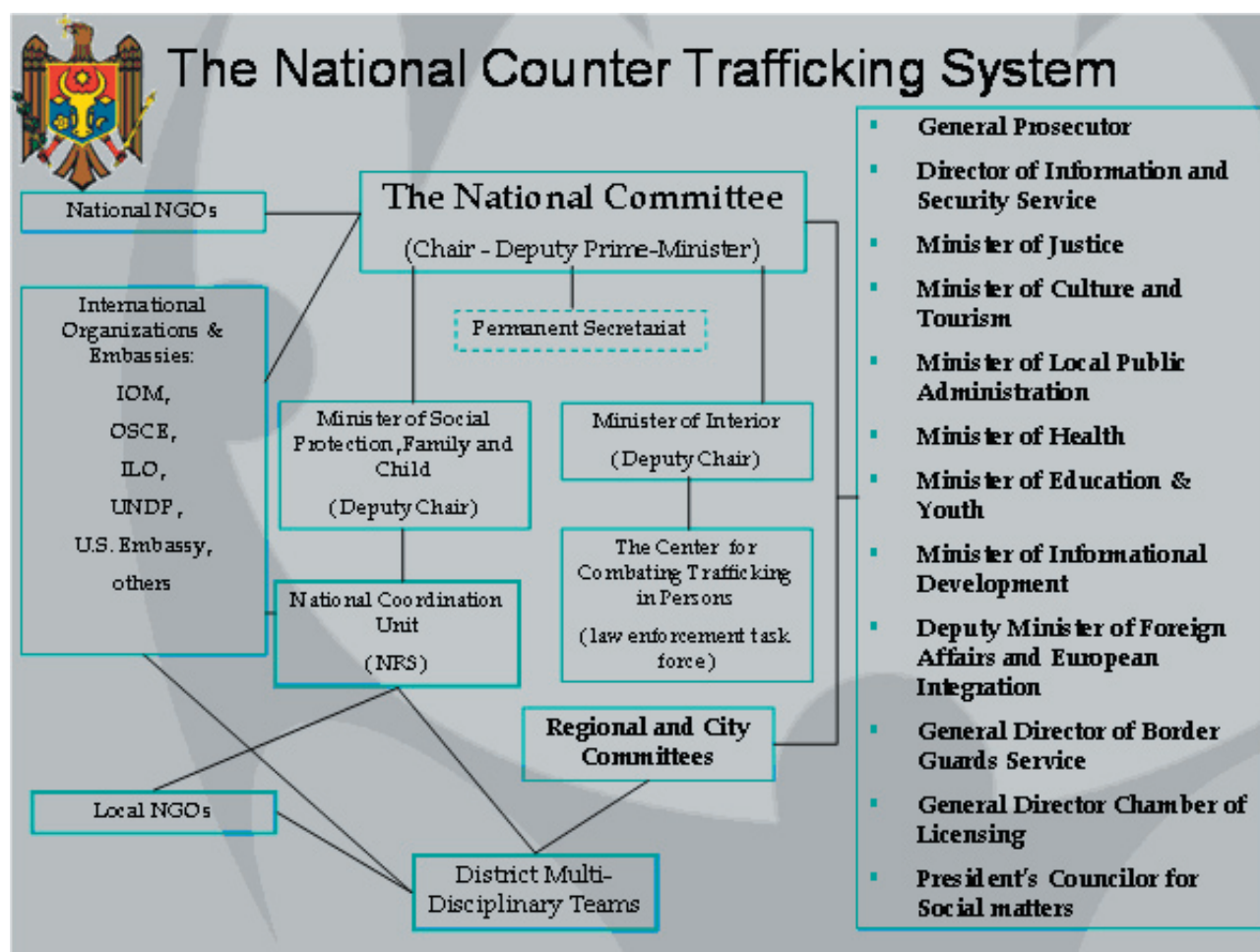
Other agencies active in Moldova in the counter-trafficking field, each with slightly different emphasis, include UN agencies such as **UNICEF** and **UNDP**, as well as NGOs such as **Winrock International**, **Terre des hommes** and **Medecins du Monde**, and there are several initiatives funded by different faith based organisations. Coordinating separate initiatives and reacting to changing trends is what all agencies aim for, but there is variation when it comes to actual capacity to do so.

II.1 Cooperation of organisations and authorities

The most promising structure of the counter-trafficking work carried out in Moldova is the National Referral System for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (NRS). The NRS links counter-trafficking efforts with existing social sector work. All major stakeholders in the counter trafficking field in Moldova participate in the NRS and the Government has full ownership over the system. The NRS is designed to facilitate access to protection services by establishing and employing referral procedures and it serves to both prevent trafficking as well as to protect and assist

the victims. Within the NRS, the state takes the leading role and acts as the coordinator of assistance and prevention measures. In December 2008 the Strategy and Action Plan for the system were approved by the Parliament, and in February 2009 the NRS entered into force. Originally the system was launched by IOM Moldova in partnership with the Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child (MoSPFC) in 5 pilot administrative units in 2006. Currently the NRS has been expanded to 30 localities, including to 1 in Transnistria. By 2011 the NRS is expected to be implemented throughout the country.

Graph 3: The NRS



Source: IOM/Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child

A cornerstone for the assistance provided through the NRS is the Chisinau Protection and Assistance Centre, a shelter specialising in assisting victims of trafficking. The shelter was established by IOM in September 2001 as an emergency response to the numerous trafficking victims returning to Moldova, especially from the Balkans. The government is increasing its ownership of the shelter each year by providing an increasing amount of the budget and in 2008 the shelter was registered as an official state institution to guarantee sustainability. The shelter offers comprehensive expert advice and support in all areas, according to individual needs of beneficiaries and is located on the grounds of a public hospital. In addition to synergy gained in health care, a stay at or a visit to the shelter does not label the beneficiaries as victims of trafficking and helps in protecting the confidentiality of the assistance.

Right from the beginning, following identification in a country of destination/repatriation or identification in Moldova, the assistance is built on multisectoral, holistic approach. To this effect, the practical tool of the NRS is the Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) formed and trained in localities. The MDTs both coordinate assistance to those returning home after a trafficking experience and identify victims in their communities who have returned independently. Through the NRS a person might be referred from local to national level for assistance (from village with limited services to shelter for specialised services) or a person can be referred to their own community from national level for implementation of reintegration plan (from shelter to village MDT for long-

term assistance). The trainings organised to implement the NRS are usually carried out by the trafficking experts of IOM and the shelter, i.e. by people who know the phenomenon, the local circumstances and who have extensive experience of working with the victims in a multi-professional team. The training is centred on gaining an understanding of the trauma of trafficking and its consequences on the behaviour of the survivors, and the effect such a trauma is bound to have on a) needs and the ability to express them, and b) ability/willingness to cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

This system of cooperation and referrals is also used to prevent trafficking – to help people before they become victims. The basic idea is to identify and assist people who have a profile similar to the victims of trafficking before they were trafficked. This work is largely carried out as a part of standard social work, and can be seen as part of the ongoing social sector reform being implemented in Moldova. The targeted proactive prevention of the NRS is also linked with especially the work done to combat domestic violence, which has been identified as a major push factor for Moldovan women (over 90% of those assisted by IOM and La Strada were victims of domestic violence before being trafficked).

The mainstreaming of the NRS approach largely depends on the actors active in localities; in some cases this multidisciplinary and horizontal cooperation has yielded excellent results and in some areas there is either lack of resources or lack of interest or commitment.

Example: A woman travelled to Ukraine as an irregular migrant, fell victim to traffickers and became pregnant and gave birth to a child in the exploitation situation. After returning to Moldova the assistance she sought at the shelter included securing her child identification documents; the prerequisite for any civic rights.

Example: A child falls seriously ill and the family find themselves in a very difficult financial situation. The population in the rural areas is poor enough for the health care for a sick child to depend on finding money for a bus tickets to a hospital in town. Through the NRS the child's treatment is covered for and the parents do not have to migrate to earn the money for the care.

II.2 Prevention

The counter-trafficking work in Moldova is changing to more and more centre around prevention. Prevention of trafficking can be concrete individual assistance, for example finding a suitable education opportunity or securing safe living conditions. The rationale for the proactive prevention is that lack of income and employment opportunities encourages migration and also places the migrant in a vulnerable position (see description of proactive prevention through the NRS above). The profile of victims is used to target activities, to e.g. residential institutions for children and youth (which house orphans, but also for example children left behind by migrating parents), youth in general and families who come to the attention of social services due to poverty or other factors. It is worth while noting that it is much easier to secure funding to assist certified victims of trafficking, than to commit donors to fund the proactive prevention work.

There are also several more traditional prevention through awareness raising - projects being implemented, where safe migration is promoted and the risks of

irregular migration and signs of possible danger of trafficking are disseminated through brochures, seminars, peer-to-peer networks and cultural initiatives. Prevention specialists visit especially educational institutions, and while some concentrate only on trafficking some deal with the issue in a more general manner, discussing alternatives to working abroad.

Example: Centre for Vocational Training and Social Reintegration "Island of Hope" specialises in supporting victims and potential victims of trafficking. Through practical vocational training and an individualised social assistance program the centre supports the beneficiaries' ability to cope and to reintegrate. The centre has staff who specialise in prevention of trafficking and re-victimisation. Some of the students referred to benefit of their specialisation by other organisations through the NRS also live at the school. Despite the professional specialisation of the staff and the support services, due to the stigma attached to victims of trafficking, the "Island of Hope" is a regular private vocational training centre, which admits student through normal application procedures, while funding and referrals to the trafficking program come from e.g. IOM, through the National Employment Agency.

Example: In November 2005 the IOM Moldova – produced play “Abandoned People” was premiered at the Eugene Ionesco theatre in Chisinau. The play tells the stories of irregular Moldovan migrants in Italy, and of those they left behind in the home country. The script by Dumitru Crudu is based on true stories of seven families torn apart. The social drama describes touchingly, through the stories of these individuals, the realities and risks of irregular migration. The success of the play encouraged IOM to build a national awareness raising campaign around the production. In the first phase more than 8 000 persons went to see the play free of charge around the country and a DVD was made of the production. In the second

phase of this campaign material was produced to enable 70 trained volunteers to go around the schools of Moldova showing the play and discussing the issues with students. In 140 such screenings c. 13 500 Moldovan school children saw “Abandoned People”. At the same time the stills exhibition “7 Questions in Search of Answers” was exhibited all around the country and local TV stations were showing the play. 75% out of those who saw the play changed their opinion about migration, 67% of the audience considered treatment of social problems by the means of arts to be very successful, and 85% considered the play to clearly reflect the realities of migration, or at least the negative consequences.

II.3 Assistance to victims

The counter-trafficking efforts in Moldova started as the organisations’ response to the cases of individual trafficked persons brought to their attention. Therefore assistance to victims of trafficking is the traditional *modus operandi* and has been developed the furthest. Assistance is offered and carried out by many actors and across the country.

Some of the work is long term, and done in cooperation with the authorities, other organisations and the victims themselves. Some work, on the other hand, is short term project-based work, concentrating on for example collection of goods needed in assistance efforts.

Graph 4: Victims of trafficking assisted by IOM Moldova between 2000 and 2008, according to sex, type of trafficking and type of exploitation

Sex	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Female	308	364	292	232	252	261	285	242	140	2376
Male					4	4	10	31	18	67
Total	308	364	292	232	256	265	295	273	158	2443

Type of Trafficking	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
International	307	364	288	232	250	256	270	259	128	2354
Internal	1		4		6	9	25	14	30	89
Total	308	364	292	232	256	265	295	273	158	2443

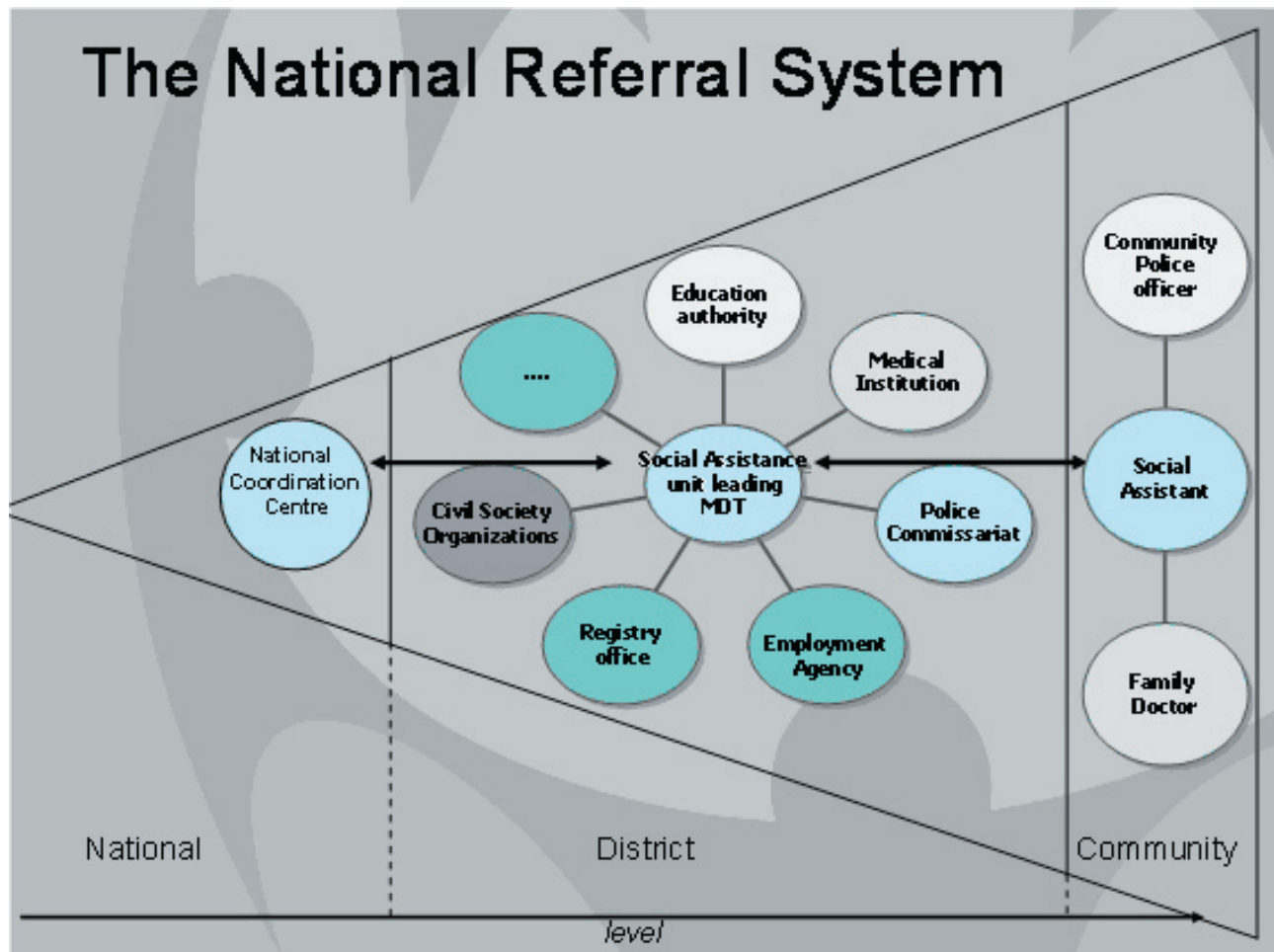
Type of exploitation	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Sexual	308	364	292	232	196	215	207	172	111	2097
Labour					18	15	35	59	32	159
Begging					20	17	15	17	7	76
Organ removal								3	5	8
Combined					22	9	22	9		62
n/a						9	16	13	3	41
Total	308	364	292	232	256	265	295	273	158	2443

Source: IOM Moldova

Providing assistance through the cooperative network of National Referral System means that beneficiaries of organisations and actors belonging to the system have access to much more than any one actor is able to provide.

Cases can be managed using the full scale of services available, from community level to national level, according to needs and resources.

Graph 5: The NRS actors on national, district and community level



Source: IOM/Ministry of Social Protection, Family and Child

Below is an example of the process that a Moldovan victim identified abroad might go through in order to start their life again. It is worth noticing that most likely the majority of victims return home on their own and only coincidentally come to the attention of organisations or authorities and receive assistance – this example is therefore just one possible route for the trafficking survivor from exploitation back to normal life.

A. Identification

La Strada hotline receives a call from a woman living in rural Moldova. She is worried about her daughter Maria, who left to work in Russia. Maria has called home every now and then, but the mother thinks their conversations are monitored and Maria is not free to talk. The volunteer hotline operator first asks if it would be possible to get Maria's phone number or to pass on the hotline number to her. When this does

not seem possible, the mother is instructed on how to collect information about Maria's location and situation with questions to which she can reply simply "yes" or "no". If Maria knows where she is being held, she is asked to convey the location in code, for example by the first letters of names (Maria-Olga-Sergey-Corinna...). If Maria does not know where she is, the mother has to try to find out as much as she can otherwise, by for example asking Maria to describe what she sees looking out the window. The location is an absolute minimum for beginning a rescue operation. In addition La Strada hopes to receive as much as information as possible on the persons involved and on the conditions; that this is really a case of trafficking.

B. Rescue

It seems evident, that Maria has been forced to sell sexual services in an apartment in Moscow. La Strada contacts the local agencies in the country of destination – either sister organisations or the authorities. The aim is to get Maria to a temporary safe location within 24 hours of the mother's call to the hotline. Transport back home to Moldova will then be organised as soon as possible. Usually the repatriation will be arranged by IOM. Before the return home a risk-assessment is always carried out; IOM contacts the social services or other NRS partners in the locality where Maria is from, to assess if her return home would be safe and in her best interest. If the assessment is negative, and Maria has been identified as a victim of trafficking in the country of destination, and is thus entitled to a residence permit and assistance and protection services, this would stop the repatriation plan, even if that

had been initially agreed upon by La Strada, the local authorities and Maria herself. If, however, Maria has not been given the status of a victim, the decision to repatriate her to Moldova is beyond IOM or any other organisation, and would be carried out as e.g. the deportation of an irregular migrant. If Maria had been rescued without the involvement of La Strada, there would still be hope for help reaching her despite being classified as an offender (rather than a victim) by the authorities in the country of destination. The identification as victim and offering assistance might, for example, be carried out during a routine visit by a local organisation while in custody, or IOM might be contacted about the repatriation anyhow. Maria might also be given information about services available through the NRS in Moldova upon her return or thanks to an international information campaign – or she might be identified in her own village after returning on her own by the social assistant or a local NGO, who would recognise the signs of a trafficking trauma.

C. Crisis intervention

Luckily for Maria, she is one of those trafficking survivors who have something and someone to return to, and as there are no risks involved in coming back home, IOM arranges for her travel back and an IOM repatriation specialist or a social worker from the shelter meets her at the airport. Maria is recommended to go straight to the shelter for victims of trafficking. This is not mandatory, but most repatriated victims begin their recovery at this specialised unit offering all services under one roof. The shelter is located in the premises of

a Chisinau hospital, and has in-residence multidisciplinary staff offering medical, psychological, social, vocational, legal etc. services. Maria, as a result of the emergency rescue operation, also needs money and basic necessities. The NRS-trained social worker in charge of Maria's locality, who carried out the risk assessment, arranges for Maria's child to come join her at the shelter in Chisinau. Maria's mother, who has been looking after the child in Maria's absence, is told that Maria is safe, but no further details are given to family members to protect confidentiality. To the people in the village the family tells that Maria is staying in the capital to receive treatment in a hospital – a usual occurrence, which does not label her as having been involved in trafficking or prostitution.

D. Reintegration

Maria and her child spend about a month at the shelter. The case manager arranges a place for her at the local vocational training school, and after a six-month training she will receive a professional diploma of a hairdresser in order to support herself and her child. Maria and her child are found temporary lodgings near the school. After the training she plans to open a hairdressing business in her village. The reintegration process will continue to be monitored by the social worker, or other jointly agreed upon support person/case manager. This person has the authority, in partnership with Maria, to make necessary decisions needed in the realisation of the individually tailored reintegration plan.

III Challenges of the Moldovan counter-trafficking efforts

It is clear, that due to the extent and volume of trafficking the phenomenon has come under considerable attention and action, and that there is significant expertise in

Moldova. However, the counter-trafficking efforts in Moldova also face some unsolved challenges.

III.1 Lack of timely information

At their best counter-trafficking efforts are based on cases that come to light. Analysing the cases sheds light on recruitment methods, sectors to which people are trafficked and on the profile of victims; what makes them vulnerable for trafficking. When there are a number of similar cases assumptions can be made about the general nature of trafficking, and this information used for the development of prevention and protection measures. The problem is, however, that

trafficking can change quickly. The cases that come to light might have originated much earlier and therefore for example the hints that the analysis might produce for identifying risks can be obsolete by the time they can be used in prevention. Furthermore, relying on the identified and assisted cases might further one-track the efforts and prevent the discovery of new or unknown ways to exploit people.

III.2 Stigmatisation of victims

The counter-trafficking community in Moldova is highly aware of the stigma that victims face and takes the effects of stigmatisation into consideration in their work. The stigma attached to being involved, voluntarily or involuntarily, in the sex industry is commonplace, but lately there have been cases of men exploited in other sectors have found it very difficult to seek assistance due to the shame attached with failure. Partially because of this phenomenon there is an on-going refocusing in the assistance efforts to better include and address all exploitation. An example of this is that IOM used the film *Lilya4Ever* in awareness raising campaigns,

until it became clear that the portrayal of the issue in the film further deepened the stigma attached to falling victim to traffickers. The *Abandoned People* –campaign described above (section II.2) had a different reaction as it placed trafficking within a spectrum of exploitation of migrants and the consequences of victimisation in the framework of broken families. Portraying trafficking and its victims in this way made it something the audience could identify with and that provoked empathy and thus helped to alleviate the stereotyping and ostracising of victims.

However, while there is awareness of the problem and ability to protect the victims, the mechanism of stigmatisation remains largely unaddressed. It is also possible that prevention work that focuses on realising individual risks involved further feeds the judgemental attitudes; if the information is available the risks are thought to be avoidable and therefore victimisation is easier to see as the persons' own fault. It can also be argued that while targeting prevention activities at specific groups, such as children in residential care and from broken homes, is reasonable,

it also implicitly suggests that victimisation is more likely when it comes to these groups. It is impossible to estimate how much the identification with a certain at-risk group affects the identity of these young people, or the way they are seen in society. There is, therefore, the risk that the prevention activities might encourage behaviour that, instead of reducing it, increases likelihood of victimisation; the basic mechanism of stigma is to make people defined based on one characteristic to start realising the associated negative assumptions.

III.3 Individual basis of counter-trafficking efforts

Almost all Moldovan counter-trafficking community actors agree that the root causes of trafficking are structural: poverty, weakness of the public sector, corruption, discrimination against women etc. Also the reduction in the numbers of the most violent trafficking cases supports this view. Despite this, a considerable part of the counter-trafficking activities remain to be fragmented, short-lived projects directed at individuals. Only the efforts linked with the social sector reform, prevention of domestic violence and raising the education level of girls have targets on a larger scale. This regardless of the certainty that warning about risks involved in migration does not really help unless there are other viable alternatives available.

At least partially this can be explained by the projectised nature of funding available for the organisation-led efforts and the expectancy of quick measurable results. More long-term, comprehensive funding might produce more structural methods – although there is always the danger of losing national ownership if this is done within the international organisations centred model. However, it is also worth noting that trafficking is always linked with numerous political and power interests inside the country; even if disregarding the benefits, through corruption or other involvement, to the Moldovan power elite, only the influx of currency due to the presence of international organisations is a significant factor to the economy of the state.

III.4 Challenges in legislation and implementation

The Moldovan trafficking legislation has been developed a great deal in the past years and a number of police and court representatives work in close collaboration

with the organisations involved in providing assistance to the victims. However, there still remains plenty of prejudice and corruption to hamper the counter-trafficking efforts.

Example: There is room at the shelter specifically designed for the police to use when interviewing adult victims, with a one-way visibility darkened window behind from which a social worker can observe that the victim does not get too agitated recalling the experience. Simultaneously the social worker can make sure that the traffickers cannot threaten the victim-witness through a corrupt police officer.

Despite the advances in legislation the effect of the judiciary on the crime seems to be questionable. Representatives of the organisations working in the field report that people convicted of trafficking crimes are mainly young women involved in grass-root recruitment, while those who organise trafficking are left untouched. There is

widespread concern that those in prison for the crime include victims and also people who did not know they were involved in a trafficking network. Differentiating between a migrant and a trafficking victim seems also to be difficult for the justice system, especially when the traffickers use e.g. debt bondage instead of physical violence to control the victim.

Example: A Turkish man asked his Moldovan girlfriend, when she was going over to Turkey for a visit, to bring a friend with her, promising to pay for the travel expenses for both. The women were stopped at the airport and the girlfriend of the Turkish man apprehended for recruiting her friend into trafficking. The boyfriend had apparently used the same method before to entice women for traffickers.

III.5 Human trafficking or violation of labour rights

The counter-trafficking work done in Moldova is largely based on a human rights approach: assistance is not conditioned on fulfilling a certain trafficking definition – the determinant factor is the situation and needs of the person. In practice, however, some differentiation has to be made in a country where the majority of migrants are prepared to work in sub-standard conditions in the countries of origin. For example gender discrimination, not receiving pay, working overtime for no pay and general arbitrariness and ill-treatment of employees are everyday occurrences in Moldova. When this is combined with widespread domestic violence, poverty and corruption, the expectations that Moldovan migrants have concerning their life abroad are not very

high.

Example: At a prevention seminar in a school the lecturer was telling the room full of teenagers about the dangers of trafficking: violence is commonplace, freedoms are limited, you have to work from sunrise to sunset and you get very little, if any, money. After the seminar one of the teenagers remains behind and says that all of that is part of their normal life anyway; why not try to get abroad even if it is risky, if the worst case scenario is very similar to their current circumstances?

The difficulty of differentiating trafficking from other widespread abuse means that trafficking is easiest to identify when it happens in the sex industry – either because

there are no standard rights at all, or because the victim has not consented to work in the sector at all and the deception is easy to prove. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is further emphasised by the fact that a lot of the attention and funding comes from conservative religious organisations who are willing to discuss and support the rescue of women and children from brothels, but do not want to engage in the field of rights of migrant labour in general. It is likely that due to difficulties in definitions considerable amount of trafficking cases remain unidentified in sectors other than the sex industry, and that if the victims do seek help, they are classified as illegal migrants and either deported or incarcerated.

There is a huge difference, of course, in

different countries of destination and their responses to migration in general, labour migration and trafficking specifically. Russia, Turkey and the Middle East are main destinations for trafficking from Moldova, and it is worth noting that the classification of victims exploited also in the sex industry as illegal migrants or offenders is widespread in these countries. Falling victim to trafficking is linked to the inability to control one's situation, to address the authorities for assistance and to the lack of alternatives and support network, and often to the intensification of these problems by an irregular status. It is therefore evident that increasing the possibilities to migrate legally therefore helps to safeguard the rights of the migrant labourers and in general to address the exploitation of migrants.

III.6 Gendered assistance hampers gender sensitivity in counter-trafficking work

In relation to the relative ease of identifying women and girls exploited in the sex industry as victims of trafficking also the assistance structures are generally directed at these victims. In comparison to some countries of destination, where there are often e.g. no shelters available for male victims, the Moldovan assistance measures are more inclusive, but nevertheless there is an underlying tendency to cater more for female victims. The services are built for and specialise in assisting women and their children, the lobbying of the authorities underlines the status of women and the trainings available in reintegration are concentrated in largely female-dominated

labour sectors. The numbers of identified male victims remain to be small, but the experience there is suggests that their needs and way to deal with victimisation are very different. For men the stigma is more attached to the failure than to the nature of the exploitation. Men would not, primarily, want social and medical services, but legal assistance and to see the criminals convicted and to receive compensation for the work they were forced to do without pay. In this the service providers are powerless, and it is likely that this decreases the numbers of men in the statistics of those assisted.

Conclusions

Looking at the Moldovan experience in counter-trafficking it is evident that combating trafficking can not be a separate exercise. Protecting victims and preventing the crime demands that the phenomenon be treated in relation to the realities surrounding it in countries of origin, transit and destination. First of all, trafficking is a part of labour migration, and thus preventing it is closely tied to protecting the rights of labour migrants. There need to be legal and safe ways to migrate, and these need to be coupled with coordinated efforts in transit and destination countries to ensure migrant labourers in all sectors have the platforms and access to services they need to protect themselves against and to escape exploitation.

Secondly, while it is crucial that potential migrants have access to reliable information and support, the efforts in the countries of origin must not remain at awareness raising or information distribution level. For prevention of trafficking to be effective, it has to be carried out in relation to other social and economic development work, and in practical terms make a difference in people's lives to stop victimisation. Furthermore, counter-trafficking efforts must not be separate from other human rights defence work. Economic and judicial vulnerability as well as lack of knowledge resources are central factors in making people vulnerable to trafficking. Linking counter-trafficking efforts with

discrimination is therefore as important as is to couple combating trafficking with fight against impunity and corruption.

In Moldova the anti-trafficking agencies consider domestic violence and other discrimination against women to be an important push factor for trafficking, especially of girls and women, and directing the NRS to address domestic violence in addition to trafficking is evidence of the dedication of the counter-trafficking community and the Government. It is clear that the NRS in Moldova is the central framework within which the necessary connections and coordination can be done. The role of the NRS is all the more central when considering that the main destination countries of Moldovan traffickers are notoriously reluctant or incapable to identify and assist victims: Russia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Cyprus etc. The NRS can be said to be a best-practice model in partnering international organisations, non-governmental organisations and governmental actors in a way that optimises the use of human and other resources. It could be argued that the main challenge of the NRS-led efforts are to be found with its forte – flexibility is its core strength, but can also serve in providing room for corruption, inaction and neglect. However, despite this one can say that the Moldovan actors have managed to join efforts in a way that has the rights of the victim and needs-based (rather

than status-based) assistance at its centre; this is an impressive feat, especially considering the limited resources and in comparison to many countries of destination and transit. What remains outside the reach of any national system Moldova can muster is the

effect of downturns like the current one the world is recovering from, and of course the treatment of labourers in richer countries, and the response those societies choose to have to the mistreatment and exploitation of migrants for financial gain.

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- Judith Hale, Senior Anti-Trafficking & Gender Adviser

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